

Tear out and return to Sigma Tau  
National Headquarters  
204 Bancroft Hall  
University of Nebraska  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

My address for the next issue of Sigma Tau Pyramid should be changed from:

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street address new street address

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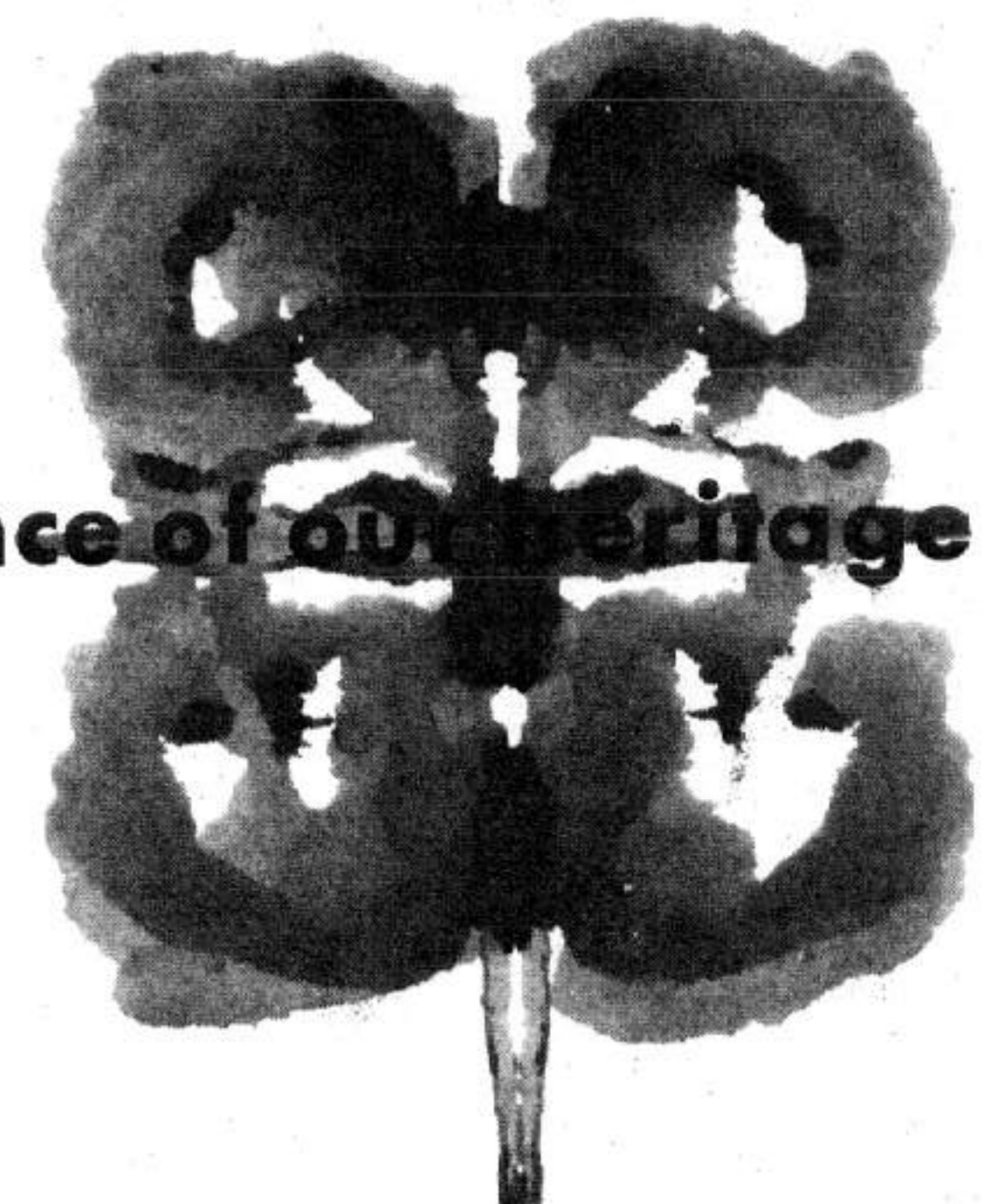
\_\_\_\_\_  
your name

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your chapter or college

I hereby enclose \$\_\_\_\_\_ for the Sigma Tau Sustaining Fund for 1970-'71 school year.

Here's my news item (or attach separate sheet) for the next Pyramid:

*Fall-Winter 1970*



**the essence of our heritage**

## Sigma Tau's Three Founder Presidents Exemplify its Ideals

by Morris Cook

Occasionally there are coincidences of time, place, events and people which, when viewed in the perspective of later years, show that mere statistical probabilities at times produce quite fruitful results. Frequently the answers are entirely logical in that certain needs develop, call for solution and perceptive men recognize the situation and act accordingly. It would appear that the founding of Sigma Tau fit into this pattern.

Engineering education, as we know it today, really became a formal academic curriculum about a century ago. Its constituent elements, mathematics, mechanics, chemistry, physics etc. previously had been taught as parts of other curricula. Although tremendous progress had been made in the practice of engineering it had evolved haphazardly over some thousands of years. In the latter half of the nineteenth century colleges of engineering began to appear and the several specialties of the profession were recognized by the establishment of course leading to formal engineering degrees. Engineering had finally attained the recognized dignity of a profession, taking its place along with those older ones of Law, Medicine, the Ministry, etc.

## Davidson and Scholarship

Outstanding scholarship called for recognition and around the turn of the century engineering honor societies appeared in considerable numbers. As might be expected they were generally local in scope because communication between universities was rather sketchy as compared with today. So, the time being ripe, fourteen men at the University of Nebraska "invented" Sigma Tau. The term "invented" is used advisedly as at that time it was the fashion to pattern honor societies in the Phi Beta Kappa tradition in which scholarship alone was the qualification, and selection for membership was more or less automatic by grades. Our founders, guided and encouraged by such faculty advisors as Dr. Charles Russ Richards and Dean O.V.P. Stout envisioned a society which would foster a true spirit of engineering professionalism as well as the practical application of scientific knowledge and principles, thus combining several factors which gave promise of professional attainment. Accordingly they added to scholarship the qualities of practicality and sociability as evidence that a candidate for membership would have the balanced and well rounded personality that could lead to success as an engineer. With the passage of years other societies have followed this lead, thereby recognizing the wisdom of those early decisions.

Five of those fourteen founders have served as National Presidents of Sigma Tau. It has been the pleasure and the privilege of this writer to have been closely associated with three of them in the work of the National Council and it is of these three in particular that this article is written. Like the other founders these three have all passed away, J. Brownlee Davidson in 1957, Verne Hedge in 1963 and John C. Stevens most recently in 1970. It is fitting that recognition be given to them for some of the special ways in which they helped to build and continued to serve and honor Sigma Tau by their careers. Each of these three men in his lifetime illustrated outstandingly one of the basic principles of the society, Davidson in Scholarship, Stevens in Practicality and Hedge in Sociability.

One of Davidson's contributions during the formation of the Fraternity was the selection and definition of symbols and the design of the key, evidence of his interest in the traditions and the historical background of the engineering profession. Immediately after his graduation from Nebraska in 1904 he entered upon an academic career at his Alma Mater as an instructor in what was then called Farm Mechanics. The following forty-one years were filled with accomplishments and recognitions of the highest order in his profession. As Professor, Researcher, Administrator, Author, Advisor and Consultant to Universities, Professional Societies, American and Foreign Administrations and Governments he was the recipient of a host of distinguished honors, medals and awards. Organizer and first President of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers he was active in many facets of his profession. In all of these he was ever the advocate, the leader and the practitioner of thorough and solid science and scholarship as foundations for engineering progress.

Personally a friendly man of great charm and simple warmth, he was a popular and effective leader and teacher. During his four years as National president of Sigma Tau the Fraternity was passing through some critical years. World War I

had severely tried the relatively young organization, finances were at a low ebb and the campus competition between honor societies was often bitter. The Association of College Honor Societies was founded in an attempt to bring some order into that field. A series of negotiations with Tau Beta Pi looking toward merger was undertaken upon the urging of the Association of College Honor Societies and the invitation of Tau Beta Pi. These discussions culminated in a meeting of the two National Councils of Chicago in 1928 in which a tentative plan was agreed upon. This plan however failed to receive the approval of both societies in simultaneous conclaves held in 1928 at Urbana, Illinois and St. Louis. Through these crises Dr. Davidson's vision and talent for leadership helped tremendously in setting the course for the future. It was a memorable experience to work with him and to observe his talent for the quiet persuasion that helped to solve so many problems. He declined re-election as National President because of the many other demands being made for his services, most immediately as a consultant in helping to solve the critical food and agricultural crises in Russia. However he continued to serve Sigma Tau and the many other organizations of which he was an active member and participant.

John C. Stevens was a great engineer, consultant, organizer and administrator. He was the author of the Sigma Tau Ritual which in many ways was patterned after the craft traditions of the Masonic Order. In his time it was the common practice, in fact almost a requirement, for a candidate for Sigma Tau membership to have had some field experience along with his academic work. Stevens, who was somewhat older than the typical undergraduate had had a breadth of experience, including military service in the Spanish-American War and he fitted into this pattern. Following graduation in 1905 he soon demonstrated his talents in the field of Civil Engineering and set his career in the practical application of engineering principles to the construction of almost innumerable projects, many of tremendous scope in irrigation, power generation and public works.

When he assumed the Presidency of Sigma Tau in 1928 he was an engineer of national prominence. His four years as National President were characterized by his skillful direction of the expansion of the fraternity and the build up of financial strength through the difficult years of the early part of the Depression. He was a man who inspired confidence by his direct approach and practical analysis and solution of problems; qualities in keeping with his somewhat rugged, no nonsense appearance and personality. He knew how to get things done.

Although in his younger years he worked as an engineer for the Burlington Railroad Verne Hedge often referred to himself as a "Backsliding Engineer" partly because his life's business was the ownership and operation of his title abstract office. This humorous self-deprecation was misleading. He might more properly have been labeled as a "Human Engineer". A great part of his time and energy were devoted to Community Service and to the social and political side of life. He was a fluent and persuasive speaker with a marvelous stage presence. He had an excellent command of the language, both written and spoken. He was the author of the Sigma Tau Key Presentation Ceremony

## Stevens in Practicality

## Hedge in Sociability

which he conducted so many times. He was the Master of Ceremonies at the first Sigma Tau Banquet. He was a Masonic Grand Lecturer and a lifetime member of that order in which he held a number of the highest office. He was Mayor of the City of Lincoln. His participation in the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, the Christian Church, Community Chests, the University of Nebraska Alumni Association and many other organizations and activities shows the breadth and the depth of his talents and interests. His entire life was unusually successful as a business leader, a community builder, a public servant and a distinguished citizen.

Beginning with his undergraduate days he was a moving force in many campus organizations, in the social and honorary fraternities and the Engineering Societies. After graduation he served on the National Councils of Sigma Tau and Kappa Sigma, his social Fraternity. He served as National President of both of these organizations; in Sigma Tau from 1932 to 1938. To all of these assignments he brought the same order of excellent administration that characterized his many lifetime tasks. Throughout his long and distinguished career he set an outstanding example of the quality of Sociability in the highest degree.

Sigma Tau has indeed been fortunate in having had J. Brownlee Davidson, John C. Stevens and Verne Hedge as founders, lifetime participants and National Presidents. By their careers, each in his own way, they have practiced and exemplified the three basic principles of Sigma Tau, Scholarship, Practicality and Sociability.

M.H. Cook, Theta 1921

## Report of National Council Meeting

A meeting of the National Council of Sigma Tau was held in Lincoln, Nebraska, December 4-5-6, 1970, with all seven members of the Council in attendance. The president of the Sigma Tau Foundation was also in attendance and presided over a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Foundation, which consists of four members who are also members of the Council, and the president.

Routine business was conducted which included the examination and acceptance of a financial audit of the fraternity accounts. There was also some special business brought before the Council to which this report will be largely devoted.

At the time of the writing of this report, 31 chapters out of the 33 have submitted their Annual Chapter Reports. These chapter reports indicated very clearly that the largest single reason that prospective pledges turned down an invitation to join Sigma Tau was lack of money. What with the cost of living in general and the cost of education in particular going up, this is not surprising. The unfortunate aspect of this condition is that some persons who were pleased with the honor of an invitation to join Sigma Tau felt they could not afford the initiation fee.

The National Council has instituted a plan which it believes will help solve this problems and will result in the initiation of some worthwhile students who would otherwise be lost to the Fraternity. This plan is being called the "Deferred Initiation Plan" and means very simply that a student pledge, for financial reasons only, can defer his initiation for a period of not to exceed two years of gainful employment. The term "gainful employment" is used because the Council has ruled that service in any of the armed forces is not gainful employment in the usually accepted meaning of that term. This does not mean that a person could be pledged after he leaves school, nor does it mean that he could be initiated and pay later. This plan does not refer to prominent practicing engineers nor to faculty members who may be initiated as alumni members as provided by the National Constitution. In the near future, a letter will be sent to each